FICTION FROM 'BEST SHORT STORIES' BY AFRO-AMERICAN WRITERS

Such Comfort And Joy

Some accidents can be happy ones. A good example is this warm little story of love against tremendous odds.

By James H. Hill

Mort Sturgis had just finished attaching the last wire to the spark coil when he looked up and saw Talbert peering down into the man-made chasm. Talbert owned the construction company which bore his name, and he was a hard man to please where hired help was concerned.

Among the blasters, riggers, erectors, and journeyman builders who had worked for the Talbert concern, there had been only two fatalities in thirty years.

If you came to work with a wracking cough or a morning-after balloon head, you didn't work for Talbert for a whole week; and if you were subject to recurrent ailments and misspent weekends, you didn't work for him at all.

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BOB TALBERT beckoned to Sturgis now from the rim of the pit. "Come up here, Sturgis! I'd like to have a talk with you."

Mort sighed, wiped the back of his hand across his deep-brown brow, and climbed out. Perhaps Talbert had seen how carelessly he had handled those dynamite caps yesterday.

When Sturgis reached him Talbert said: "I like to have all of a man working for me, Mort."

Mort blinked at him uncomprehendingly. "All of a man?"

"Well, you're here all right, Mort; but your mind isn't here with you. That can be dangerous — for everybody around here. Anything wrong?"

There was a sardonic twist to Mort's lips. "No, nothing. I'll be all right."

Talbert gave him a lusty slap on the back. "Okay, Mort. Just want to keep you on your toes. Carry on!"

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WHEN HE went back to set his charge in the thick lime strata, Mort's eyes were glazed, and there was a lump in his throat. "Anything wrong?"... Why everything was wrong. He had been over in Europe in 1943 fighting at Normandy, the hedgerows, and Aachen, under the hard-driving Patton.

And when it was all over in Europe, he hadn't been allowed to return to the States to his girl, and she had married while he was stationed at Berlin.

He had met Marguerita in Milan, and after wrangling with the sundry officialdom for two years he was allowed to marry her.

Now — when they were expecting their first offspring, he had been shipped back to the States without Marguerita.

As he wedged in the dynamite sticks, he was wondering what his offspring would be like, and he was wondering how long it would be before he could bridge the oceans of red tape which separated him from Marguerita.

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HE RAISED the whistle to his lips and blew it shrilly three times. Twenty seconds later he would set off the charge. The workers in the immediate area scurried under steel-plate leantos and waited.

There was a scream of horror as the shack started to slide into the excavation.

A dull, crackling fulmination followed, as brown earth and stone geysered up into the sky.

The next instant a scream of horror split the air. Mort turned in the general direction of the bloodcurdling yell and could scarcely credit the sight which met his eyes.

The temporary, rough-board office where Talbert stayed most of the time was noising down into a shifting ooze of earth. Mort caught sight of Talbert's terrified face as the contractor tried to force open the door of the building.

It is an awe-inspiring sight to see the ground twisting around like that — like an invisible giant hand kneading dough. But it was one of the chances you took when you dug down into the bowels of the earth.

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MORT'S FIRST impulse was to race over the shifting ground and try to help Talbert escape his wooden tomb. But that would have been suicide. The seething earth would have swallowed him.

He leaped into a bulldozer, meshed the mighty gears, and started a slow but inexorable advance upon the sinking office. He had known blasting to set off tremblers before. But he was afraid just the same—desperately afraid.

The bulldozer, its scraper lifted, nearly keeled over in the slowly churning trough. Only the slanting roof of the office was now visible.

Mort Sturgis poured on more coal, and the bulldozer growled its protest deep in its steel throat. The big hind wheels churned mightily, and the blade came down shearing off the roof like you'd cut the top off a cereal box.

Mort braked the machine to a halt, aware that the ground still shifted as he lowered a chain to white-faced Talbert. The sinking man caught the chain in a frenzied grip, and the brown man set the dozer in motion again, fighting the shifting ground until he reached a solid area.

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TALBERT, his whole body covered with dirt, was getting to his knees, laughing and crying at the miracle of his rescue. Mort helped him to his feet. His first words were: "It's two weeks to Christmas, Mort. What do you want most of all for the season? You name it, and you shall have it."

Mort Storgis smiled and shrugged. He knew that a rank outsider couldn't accomplish in two weeks what he had tried to accomplish in four months. So he said: "You couldn't get it for me anyway, Mr. Talbert."

So far he had saved two hundred dollars for Marguerita's boat fare to the States. By spring he should be able to send for her.

There was buoyance in his stride, and nerve in his manner, when Mort Sturgis came home Christmas Eve. Despite the sharpness of the wind and the fine snow that beat into his face, he was a very happy man.

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BOB TALBERT had just given him a special Christmas present—a five hundred dollar bonus! To Mort it meant that the biggest obstacle had been hurtled. He could send for Marguerita tomorrow if it weren't Christmas. It was gratifying to know he had the necessary money.

He was putting the tinfoil icicles on his mother's Christmas tree when the doorbell rang. He moved two sets of treelights and answered the summons.

Bob Talbert was standing out there, his manner apologetic as he said: "I wonder if you'd go over to the hospital with me, Mort. There's been an accident."

"Accident — someone I know?"

Talbert nodded. "Will you come?"

"Sure!"

Talbert was silent all the way to the hospital. Upon arrival the receptionist guided them to room 4B.

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THEY WENT in. Mort caught his breath and stood transfixed. It was unbelievable. He turned to Talbot for reassurance that this was not a dream. He lowered his eyes to the bed before him. Upon it lay Marguerita, a tan infant in her trembling arms.

"The boy was the accident," Talbert smiled. "He was born as your wife crossed the Azores."

The astounded father was still numb and speechless. His throat was dry, and tears trickled down his face.

When speech finally came, Mort said one word only: "Marguerita!" The exotic mother smiled sweetly, as the father knelt beside the bed, his outstretched arms moving gently toward her.

Perhaps the tears in his eyes gave the illusion of halos about the heads of mother and child. But the spirit of peace that settled upon him was not an illusion. He knew that life could be beautiful.

AFRO PATTERNS

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No. 1532 with PHOTO-GUIDE is in sizes 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20. Sizes 12, 32 bust, jerkin, 1⅛ yards of 54-inch; skirt, 1⅞ yards.

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Don't miss the new sewing manual Home Sewing for '57—an inspiring pattern book filled with all-season styles. Gift pattern printed in the book 25¢.

More Players In Pro Football Than In Big League Baseball

- Greatest runner in the history of the gridiron is a colored fullback.
- There has never been a Pro Bowl game (football's equivalent to the Major League All-Star Classic) that didn't include a colored player.
- One NFL standout has played in all of the Pro Bowl Games.
- Pro football has two colored men in executive positions. Organized baseball has none.

By Sam Lacy

Forty colored players earned salaries with National Football League teams during the 1957 season.

The Baltimore Colts, who waged a gallant fight in seeking to bring the Monumental City its first pro title, shared leadership in the hiring of tan personnel with the defending champion New York Giants and Chicago Cardinals.

Each had six players. The Colts, however, also had Buddy Young on their payroll in the capacity of scout.

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EVIDENCE OF how far professional football has travelled in the furtherance of democracy, may be found in the fact that there seems to be no ceiling on the colored player's aspirations.

Two young men — Buddy Young and Lowell Perry —already have climbed higher in the National Football League than has any tan baseball player or professional basketeer.

Young is serving his second year as a scout and assistant director of public relations with the Baltimore Colts. And Perry is completing his first season as end coach of the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Except for a few minor assignments as "special" coaches (for tan talent), and as publicists to deal specifically with colored newspapers, the baseball major leagues have nothing to compare with the football appointments of Young and Perry.

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WOULD YOU believe that there were fewer colored players in the 16-team baseball organization last summer than there are today in the 12-team football setup?

Fourteen teams of the American and National leagues had 35 tan players during the regular (June 15-August 31) season of 1957.

Eleven teams of the NFL list 40 tan players on their current rosters.

Two teams, the Boston Red Sox and Detroit Tigers, operated as "lillywhites" of baseball.

Neither has ever had a colored player, nor has the Washington Redskins in football.

None of the three has won a championship in the eleven years they have flaunted progress by refusing to tap the reservoir of tan talent.

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ON THE other hand, the free use of colored athletes by such as the Cleveland Browns, New York Giants, Los Angeles Rams (football); and Brooklyn Dodgers, New York Giants and Milwaukee Braves (baseball) has served to keep those teams constantly in the thick of the battle for their respective titles.

The Browns, who long have boasted a heavy infiltration of tan players, only once in the last eight years (1956) missed being in the playoff for the world pro championship.

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AT THE height of their reign as kingpins of the league, the Browns counted four colored stars among their mainstays: fullback Marion Motley, ends Len Ford and Horace Gillom, and guard Bill Willis.

When they won their world title in 1956, the New York Giants did it also with the aid of a tan quartet: fullback Mel Triplett, halfback Emlen Tunnell, and tackles Roosevelt Brown and Roosevelt Grier.

Still another famous foursome contributed nobly to the cause of the Rams when they brought honors to Los Angeles in 1949-50-51-55. These talented tansters were halfback Dan Towler, fullback Tank Younger, end Bob Boyd and safety man Woodley Lewis.

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THERE ARE just a few examples of the contributions made by colored players in the year since the All-America Conference introduced them to modern organized pro football in 1946.

Fritz Pollard, Duke Slater, Horace Bell, Bob Marshall and some others of an earlier day, had played in the loosely-knit game that preceded the All-America Conference.

And there were still others who performed with AAC clubs but missed out when the conference was absorbed by the National Football League in 1950.

Included among the latter were such good players as Bill Bass, Paul Patterson, Bert Piggott (Chicago Rockets), John Brown (Los Angeles Dons), Elmore Harris (Brooklyn Dodgers) and Jerry Fletcher (Baltimore Colts), to name a few.

Patterson had been a teammate of Buddy Young at Illinois, Piggott has lately been named coach of football at A. and T. College, and Brown played several years in Canada before retiring and entering business in Toronto.

Harris, a track and grid star at Morgan State College, is currently operating his own business in New York City. Fletcher's whereabouts are unknown.

As has been stated, these were some of the fine players who failed to survive the pruning of ranks which took place when the AAC merged with the NFL in 1950.

* * *

THE GREATEST runner in recorded pro football history is Joe (Jet) Perry, the hard-hitting fullback of the San Francisco Forty-Niners!

The 28-year-old speedster had gained 6,682 yards as the 1957 season got under way.

Because Perry's record includes two years in the defunct AAC, he is not credited with the all-time mark by the NFL. That is held by Steve Van Buren, the one-time steamroller of the Philadelphia Eagles.

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JIM BROWN, the rookie fullback of the Browns, made 237 yards against the Los Angeles Rams in November, to become the greatest single-game rusher in the sport. Incidentally, it was another tan back, the Rams' Tom Wilson, who held the mark (223 yards) up to the time of Brown's achievement.

Willie Gilmor's four touchdowns against Lost Angeles on October 27, represent the biggest TD output for one game in the annals of the NFL.

Longest punt return in the league's record book is the 94-yard TD caper by Tom Casey for the old New York Yankees against Brooklyn in 1948. Casey, by the way, was a product of Hampton Institute.

* * *

EMLEN TUNNELL, the "old pro" of the New York Giants, boasts several marks in the NFL.

His four touchdowns with kick runbacks tie for the single-season high in this department; his 38 punt returns in one year establish him as the most durable safety man in the loop, and his 74 pass interceptions are unmatched in the career of any other player.

While on the subject of Tunnell, it is worthy of note that he is completing his tenth year with the Giants, holds the record for consecutive games at 115 (except for field goa specialists), and has never missed being selected for th Pro Bowl game, the football equvalent to the Major League All Star baseball classic.

Since the bowl game became an NFL fixture in 1951, Em has been a pick for the Eastern Conference every year.

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A COUNTLESS number of brilliant achievements are otherwise credited to colored athletes, in both the National League and one-time rival All-America Conference.

Marion Motley, for example, wears a name that is synonymous with greatness. And there have been others whose feats will long be remembered by followers of the sport.

Buddy Young, Len Ford, Bob Mann, George Taliaferro, Tank Younger, Dan Towler, to cite a few of the older crop.

Then there are the Perrys, the Matsons, Jim Browns, Willie Galimores, Tom Wilsons and others of the younger set.

Motley, the bruising powerhouse who preceded Jim Brown in the fullback slot at Cleveland, churned a tremendous total of 4,712 yards in his eight years (1946-53). His 6.18 yards career average stand as a monument to his greatness.

Young was recognized during his years in the game as one of the most exciting performers in all professional sports.

He and Ford (who had his baptismal at Morgan State College) were eight times picked on the all-pro squad, Young on offense and Ford for his genius on defense.

Mann, while with the Detroit Lions, won honors as a pass receiver. His 66 receptions in 1949, hold as the third highest

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Pro Bowl Lineup

Six colored players have been named to participate in the annual All-Star Pro Bowl game in Los Angeles January 12.

On the East's offensive team will be Jack McClairen, Pittsburgh Steelers, end; Roosevelt Brown, N.Y. Giants, tackle; Ollie Matson, Chicago Cardinals, halfback; Jim Brown, Cleveland Browns, fullback; and Emlen Tunnell, N.Y. Giants, defensive safety. The West team will have Tom Wilson, L.A. Rams, halfback.

On The Rosters

COLTS (6)—Halfbacks Lenny Moore, Milt Davis and Jesse Thomas; tackles Gene Lipscombe, Jim Parker and Luke Owens;

GIANTS (6)—Halfback Emlen Tunnell; fullbacks Mel Triplett and Bobby Epps; tackles Roosevelt Brown and Roosevelt Grier, and guard Jack Spinks;

CARDINALS (6)—Halfbacks Ollie Matson, Woodley Lewis, Dick Lane, Jim Hill; fullbacks Dave Mann and Julian Spence;

CHICAGO BEARS (4)—Halfbacks Bobby Watkins, Willie Galimore, Perry Jeter and J. C. Caroline;

LOS ANGELES RAMS (4)—Halfback Tom Wilson, fullback Tank Younger, and ends Bob Boyd and Lamar Lundy;

PITTSBURGH STEELERS (4)—End Jack McClairen, tackles Willie McClung and Jack Nisby, fullback Frank Purnell;

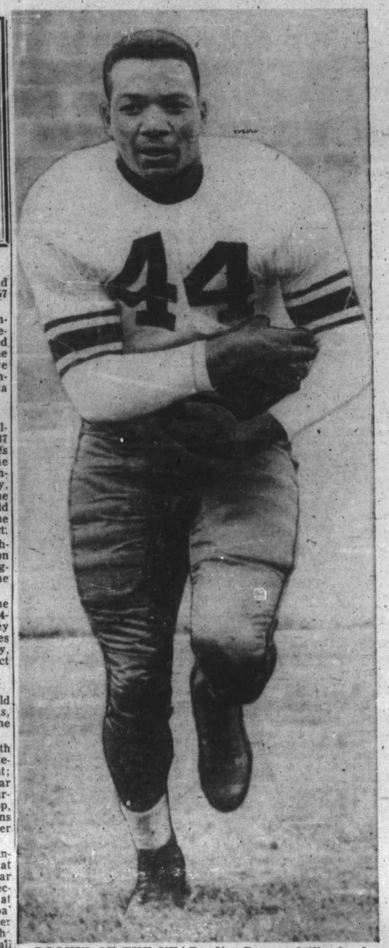
SAN FRANCISCO 49ers (3)—Halfback R. C. Owens, fullback Joe Perry, end Charley Powell;

CLEVELAND BROWNS (3) —End Len Ford, halfback Milt Campbell, fullback Jim Brown;

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES (2)—Halfbacks Eddie Bell and Clarence Peaks;

GREEN BAY PACKERS (1)—Tackle Nate Borden;

DETROIT LIONS (1)—Fullback John Henry Johnson.



ROOKIE OF THE YEAR—Jim Brown, fullback of the Cleveland Browns, selected for this honor for the 1957 season.